3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
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593 866 *doo*, the room specially set aside for the boys of the homestead to sleep in. Tale ideas of propriety come into this. If a woman has children over the age of about 3 sleeping with her and her husband wants to come to her, he will order the children to go and sleep in another room. Older children are said to know that they must leave the room for the night when their father comes to their mother. Tallensi are horrified at the suggestion that children who 'have sense' might witness sexual relations between their parents.

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868 866 602 As we have mentioned, a boy of about 12 is generally able to help his mother with the cultivation of her ground-nut plot, the produce of which is entirely at her own disposal. He often has a small ground-nut plot of his own and the produce of it belongs to him. He may, for instance, sell his ground-nuts for a few pence in order to buy himself a loin-cloth. Or he may prefer to keep them; and then he will store them in one of his mother's store-pots. He may have a hen of his own, too, as we have observed, and its eggs, or any chickens he succeeds in breeding from them, belong to him. Now it is very unusual for a boy to be given this first start in animal husbandry by his father. For he already has a share in his father's property. He will contribute to its acquisition by his labour, and he will one day, as the natives always emphasize, inherit it. A boy gets his first hen from his mother or from one of his matrilateral kinsmen, most commonly his maternal grandfather (*yaab*) or uncle (*ahəb*), but sometimes his father's *ahəb* or some other kinsman of that class. This is a quasi-paternal gesture on the part of the maternal uncle knitting his ties with his sister's son more closely. Many a Talən can point with pride to a cow which he bought with the proceeds of selling goats and sheep of his own breeding, the first of which was bought with the money he had saved from selling chickens bred from the hen his uncle gave him. And when the cow gets old he is obliged to take it to his mother's brother to be sacrificed to the latter's lineage *bɔyar* as a thank-offering.

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866 593 The significant point, here, is that a boy begins to act and feel as a social personality in his own right in economic terms and in opposition to his patrilineal line. His self-differentiation is a function of his matrilateral kinship, correlated with the antithesis between the *dug* and the *yir* in the structure of the joint family. Their childhood attempts at animal husbandry may be the first stage in the economic differentiation of sons of the same man by different mothers; and it is this that leads, at a later stage of the lineage cycle, to their separation. When that time comes it is a common thing for a man to 'beg' (*soh*) land, to build on and farm, from his maternal uncle. The gift of a hen is repeated at a higher economic level in a form appropriate to the nephew's wants and maturity.[1]

The economic self-differentiation of a son is both a sign of his psycho-

[1] Cf. below, Ch. XI.

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Parents and Children in Everyday Intercourse

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576 One of the most interesting things about the relations of parents and children among the Tallensi is their conduct to one another in the intercourse of everyday life. It brings out, incidentally, the distinction always clearly made between own parents and proxy parents. There is a familiarity, almost a camaraderie, between parent and child that makes the observer wonder how the authority of the parent can be as effective, and the respect and obedience of the child as sincere as the evidence of custom and belief show them to be. In this matter the Tallensi resemble us more closely than they do some other primitive peoples. It is most striking in the case of the father. From babyhood up, Tallensi address their father, both own father and classificatory father, by his name. The term *ba* (pl. *banam*), father, is used to refer to one's father or classificatory father but never in addressing him, while he is alive. After his death it is often used in addressing him in prayer as an expression of reverence. It is also used as a term of respect when addressing someone from whom one is begging a favour, or to show particular deference or courtesy, chiefly to old men. A passer-by greeting an old man not closely related to him or her, or a person of rank such as a chief's brother, addresses him as father; a person asking a small boy not closely related to him or her, for a drink, says, 'Bring me the water, oh my father'; a man who has come to intercede with a friend on behalf of the friend's son pleads, 'Desist, oh my father, desist'. Similarly, parents speak of a child as *m-bii*, 'my child', of a son as *n-dawoo* (pl. *dawoos*), 'my son', of a daughter as *m-ɒɣawoo* (pl. *ɒɣawoos*), 'my daughter', but always address a child by name.

With this mode of address goes great freedom of speech and behaviour towards a father, particularly one's own father. If children are asked about their attitudes to their parents they always say that they do not 'fear' (*zo*—in the sense of 'to stand in awe of') their own father as much as they 'fear' their father's older brother. Children will speak directly to their father, argue with him, contradict him politely, if necessary, laugh with him. No topic of conversation is tabooed or barred by etiquette.[1] No one can tell from the behaviour to each other in ordinary intercourse of a man and his adult son or married daughter that they are parent and child. In fact, the greater the apparent comradeship of a young adult with an old man, the more likely is it that they are own father and child.

One's mother, on the other hand, is never addressed by name but always as '*ma*, mother'; but a mother's co-wife is commonly addressed by the name used for her by her in-laws. There is also more restraint in the manner in which a person speaks to his mother than in his manner

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[1] Sex matters, for instance, are freely discussed between parents and adult children, subject only to the rules of polite conversation.

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593 578 best is this. A 12-year-old is conscious of his seniority (*kpɛmɔt*) in relation to his younger siblings. He orders them about and pulls them up if they are not behaving properly. But whereas he would not hesitate for a moment to smack a younger *soog*, he will not go further than scolding a younger half-sibling for the same offence. Tallensi say that if you strike your younger *soog* it does not matter; your mother or your father may rebuke you afterwards and the affair is forgotten. But if you strike a half-sibling—even if the child has behaved so disgracefully that public opinion will be on your side—you cause friction in the family. The child's mother gets annoyed with you and with your mother and quarrels arise.

593 835 There is another interesting indication of this. As has been previously mentioned, Tallensi do not designate incest between brother and sister as sinful. When they say it is forbidden (*kih*), as they sometimes do, they mean it rather in the sense that it is disgraceful, scandalous, and unnatural than in the narrower ritual sense. If they are asked why then it is so uncommon, considering the many opportunities and temptations that surely offer, they explain it by the intimacy of siblings in childhood and adolescence. They deny that the temptation exists. 'Look', said Sinkawol, arguing this point with me, 'my sister, is she not marriageable? And here am I, however attractive she is, I do not even notice it; I am never aware that she has a vagina; she is just my sister and someone will one day come and marry her and I will give her to him and get my cows. You and your sister grow up together, you quarrel and make it up, how can you desire to have intercourse with her?' This is a stock argument with the Tallensi.

593 ●864 At the same time the natives are the first to point out that sexual play in childhood generally begins with a classificatory sibling. Family play is a regular thing in the under-8 play-groups; and the final realistic touch is for the 'husband' and 'wife' to pretend to have coitus. This is common knowledge, and adults laugh at it. A standing joke is to tease a small boy about his so-called sweethearts. As we have seen, Tallensi say that small children 'have no sense (*ka yam*)', and therefore it is not a breach of propriety or morals for them to play at coitus with a sibling. Every man I questioned on the subject told me, with a grin of amusement, that his first sweetheart was a 'sister', sometimes of the same expanded family, more often of the same inner or medial lineage. 'We were very small and didn't know better', they said.

But Tallensi maintain stoutly that even small boys of 6 or 7 do not play at coitus with their *soog* sisters or half-sisters. There are exceptions, of course, they readily admit. There are stupid children, precocious children, and badly brought up children. Among such children instances of brothers copulating with sisters are bound to occur. It has been known to happen even with adolescents, who are presumed to 'have sense'. If it is found out, the culprits are given a severe thrashing

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and are taunted for months afterwards by their fellows. But these are not the reasons why children so rarely commit this impropriety. It is because of the intimacy, the closeness to each other in daily life, of brother and sister. Children do not need to be told that it is wrong to copulate with a sibling of the same joint family; they know it themselves. And, in fact, children from the age of 6 or 7 and upwards always say, with an expression of disgust, that sexual play with one's own siblings is wrong. Moreover, though they are not taught it as an avoidance, they are well aware of the conventional attitudes on the subject from listening to adult conversation.[1]

Incidentally, there are no taboos on conversation on sex matters among the Tallensi. Men, women, and children are all outspoken about sexual matters, though young women are apt to use euphemisms and to talk more circumspectly than men. Some men also say that it is embarrassing to talk about sexual subjects in front of young wives or female relatives-in-law. But no native hesitates to discuss these subjects in the presence of his sister.

These ties of mutual affection and devotion between *soog* siblings last throughout life and are extended to their children too. One sees this most dramatically in the grief people show, and especially women, over the death of a *soog* sibling. Tallensi say that very often the loss of a full brother is a greater shock to a woman than the death of her husband. A husband is replaceable, a full brother not, they add. When Kpe'emi died his wife fainted and afterwards sat about disconsolately, weeping at intervals for days. His *soog* sister also fainted, but, the men said, it had been much more difficult to revive her than her sister-in-law and she became ill with grief. Seeing the two young women together one could not doubt that it was the sister who felt the blow worst.

Another vivid demonstration of the strength of this tie between full siblings occurred when Tendaan Teroog performed the succession ceremony on succeeding to the custody of his maximal lineage *bɔŋar*. A large crowd had gathered, chiefly men—clansmen, and neighbours and matrilateral kinsmen of Teroog's maximal lineage. Amongst them my

[1] The psychological undercurrents of these conventional attitudes do not concern us here, but it may be remarked that there is probably a strong and partly overt sexual component in the affective relations of brother and sister. I was struck by this when I once had an opportunity of observing the behaviour of Yamzooya (aged about 11) and his *soog* sister (aged about 8) who were playing together in a corner of the room where I was chatting to their father. The children, who were quite naked, stood embracing each other, the boy with his legs round his sister's, and they twisted and wriggled about as if they were engaged in a mixture of an orgiastic dance and a wrestling-match. They were both in a state of high excitement, panting and giggling and muttering to each other, with obvious sexual pleasure. They seemed to be oblivious of their surroundings. This game went on for about twenty minutes after which they separated and lolled back as if exhausted. These two children were most attached to each other.

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857 Sometimes a real fire is lit, but usually it is merely imagined. Real
524 grain is never used in such play—it is too valuable to waste thus, as
868 the children themselves would be the first to insist. A piece of potsherd pounded up or a handful of sand serves as grain; but a much more realistic effect is sometimes achieved by using dry baobab stamens. These can be 'winnowed' and the 'grain' ground. Green weeds and leaves are vegetables.

The children play with great zest and earnestness, yet never forget that it is but play. As they grind they hum in a low voice a grinding song they have heard from mother or elder sister. They examine the 'flour' to see that it is fine enough, try to get the right proportion of water, stir the 'porridge' thoroughly, 'dish' it out with scrupulous fairness. There is a constant interchange of conversation and commands to the smaller children: 'Bring me that dish', 'Lend me your broom', 'That's my firewood', 'Don't stir so fast', 'Come and fetch your porridge', and so on. As a rule they play together most amicably. I have observed arguments in such groups about who should do some task or another, but never quarrels. There is real co-operation, based on a distribution of tasks in play.

Such play is occasionally associated with a 'house' built of mud by a brother who often does not share the play, or actually uses the 'house' for his cattle play while his sisters are 'cooking' nearby.
●[864] It is said, also, that housekeeping play sometimes branches into sexual play, little boys and girls pretending to be husband and wife and trying to copulate. Detailed inquiry shows that this is not common.
[836] The usual method of sexual experimentation at this stage of development follows the pattern of adolescence. Small boys 'woo sweethearts' with little gifts, and sexual experiments occur in connexion with dancing or by chance opportunities.[1]

Girls' housekeeping play ceases with the beginning of pubescence. Not only are they by then already taking a full share in real housekeeping but their interests are turning to youths and marriage. Housekeeping play, in which the child rehearses the interests which it has as yet neither the skill nor the degree of social development to satisfy, and expresses the wishes which pubescence brings near to realization, has served its purpose.

[1] See my paper on 'Kinship, Incest and Exogamy', loc. cit.